
MEASURE



Literary Magazine

MEASURE

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Table of Contents

7	Bird Sanctuary	Rachel Barlage
9	A Few Haiku	Greg Potts
10	Wind	Virginia Evans
10	Beside the Point	Danielle Adams
11	Lisa	Robert C. Pfaff
12	Transcendentalist	Rachel Barlage
14	Marthy (Nearly) Vanquishes the Nefarious Lizard	Heather Moser
17	My Grandparents' Land— Killaloe, County Claire, Ireland	John D. Groppe
18	Bowling Night	Rachel Barlage
20	Lost Years	Danielle Adams
20	Kid Brothers: To My Kid Brother, Bradley Bultman	JaLeen Deardurff
22	Piano Lessons	Rachel Barlage
24	Soulmates	Robert C. Pfaff
25	Dry Water	Martin Bakowski
26	Circles	Jason Grzegorek
28	"No Knock" Warrant	Danielle Adams
28	The Future Life	Becky Johnson
29	The Loss of Self	Virginia Evans
30	The Beach	Kevin M. Ray
31	Prince Charming	Amy Ceader

31	Memory	S.H.
32	Volunteering at Children's Hospital	Rachel Barlage
33	The Unborn Lamentation	Virginia Evans
34	Spoonerisms	Heather Moser
36	Night	Robert C. Pfaff
37	Our Enchanted Playground	Amy Moss
38	Rings	Lisa L. Curley
40	Before I Slit My Wrists	Virginia Evans
41	The Train	J.W. Sacco
46	The Walk Home	Rachel Barlage
48	Sadness Part One: Stolen Childhood	Anonymous
50	She is...	Robert C. Pfaff
53	Here's a Head	Ryan Wright
55	The Julia Dream	Pat Lennon

Art Work

16, 27, 39, 45, 49	DeLea Johnson
52	Ryan Wright

Bird Sanctuary
Rachel Barlage

Walking side by side
down a worn dirt path
hidden by saturated
yellow leaves.

Stopping randomly
to pluck striking leaves
from branches.
Unzipping backpack
pockets
and slipping them in.

Following as she walks
to her favorite places,
her muffled footsteps
guide me to
her rock,
her sacred place
where she comes to write.

The rock sits on a hill
overlooking a dried-up pond.
I lie down on the cold, damp ground
legs just over the rock,
just like she showed me.

I stare at the
slender trees,
stretching slowly to the sky.
A canopy of
orange brown yellow
leaves
hiding the sharp blueness
somewhere above.

Sunshine spills through
the leaves
and lands in hazy patches
on the ground.

The woods enclose us
in their protective
embrace.

Here we are
untouchable,

invincible,

safe.

Deeper in the woods,
further from our own realities,
far away from our
daily existence,
we pass trees
scarred with the initials
and insignias
of a lost generation.

They came to ride horses,
to smoke forbidden cigarettes,
to kiss,
to escape.

At a fallen tree
lying across the path
we poke
with curious fingertips
at the rough, hard
mushrooms
growing from its sides.

She pushes one off
with a long pointed stick,
and we study its roots
in silent fascination.

As we travel deeper into
the trees,
walking on the overgrown path,
we stop collecting leaves and branches.
We no longer point at
brightly colored birds
or see the sunlight on the forest floor.
We walk in silence.

A Few Haiku
Greg Potts

Wind blows through the woods
An Axe head falls sharp
Startled Deer look up

A fox slithers silently
like a snake through tall grass
the geese take to the sky

The morning sun climbs high
while restless children play
and parents go to market

Wind

Virginia Evans

You are like the wind; powerful and unpredictable.
At times I float along and through you.
Then there are those times when you rage uncontrollably,
 not permitting me to enter,
only letting me feel your force from afar.
Why can't you be like the rain, constant and steady?
Why must I always be a bird floating along hoping to catch
 the right draft?

Beside the Point

Danielle Adams

There's a hole in her coat pocket.
A hand-me-down straight from her sister,
Lou.
She wore it until she was told
Lou
grew out of her coat again.
pants, clothes, gloves, shoes...
all worn by
Her.
She wanted a hole of her own.

Lisa

Robert C. Pfaff

Well, my love.
Time has relentlessly marched on.
Hasn't it?

Think back.
We were so young.
We've gotten older.
Haven't we?

We've loved and honored our spouses.
We've loved and honored each other.
We've seen our children grow
from the early days,
when we were sure we were too young to raise them right
to now, when they threaten to leave us forever.

We've watched friends come and go.
We've watched family come and go.
We've laughed. We've cried.
We've cheered, We've scolded.
We've been arrogant. We've been scared to death.

We've played the game, and well, I think.

So what do we have to show for it?
Wrinkles, gray hairs, a drooping waist.
Wisdom, insight, a sense of purpose.

What do we have to show for it?
Memories, my Love, and maybe that's
what the whole game is about.

Whoever has the most memories, wins.

Transcendentalist
Rachel Barlage

Eyes wide open
to the world.
"Slow down,"
her silent and
constant
demand.

Floating across an
open field,
Seeing
the smallest details
Feeling
the slightest breeze,
Sensing
the subtlest change.

Nature
surrounding her.
It is inside of her.

Long, peeling branches
hung from the ceiling
to dry her clothes.

A painted rock
used to hold her door
open
declares
"War is unhealthy
for children
and other living things."

Dried leaves
 and flowers,
Long weeds
 and plants,
Hard acorns
 and buckeyes
adorn her room.

Never without her backpack,
an acorn hanging from the string,
for collecting tiny pieces
of the soul
 of God.

Each leaf,
 each tear-shaped seed
a part of something bigger.

She wants to share her
happiness
with a friend,
bringing him to the
starlit lake
to sit in silent appreciation,
to speak of life
in reverent whispers.

But he will not come.
He cannot understand
the longings that she feels.
No one can know her,
but still she sits
quietly,
patiently,
alone.

Marty (Nearly) Vanquishes the Nefarious Lizard

Heather Moser

He was the noblest of the crickets, this fierce warrior. He was barbaric; he knew how to enter a fray and emerge victorious. That was always the imperative: emerging victorious.

And don't think the female crickets didn't notice.

Yes, Marty was a terrifying vision of glory, intimidating death to anyone foolhardy enough to anger him — this heroic cricket's very name meant shame and dishonor to those who crossed him. Even the grasshoppers trembled as he passed.

In addition, he stood an impressive 1 1/4 inches high. He was truly The Cricket among Crickets.

So it was fitting that only he dared try to slay the nefarious Phoenix - the dread lizard who inhaled crickets as if they were mere entrees. Phoenix was indeed villainous - all imposing nine inches of her - and so far her reign of terror was wreaking havoc near and far. "She must be stopped!" was the unanimous cry.

Off ventured Marty, sword in hand. He had never faced such a formidable foe, so of course he was quickly formulating a plan. This was no mere adversary; this was the treacherous Phoenix. This Godzilla of a lizard would not be easy to stop. He soon decided that his best strategy would be to try to stealthily creep up her tail until he was on her head so he could attack from there.

All of the cricket community stood in awe as he stole up her tail. They were worried, and with good cause: Phoenix appeared to be sleeping, but she was not above setting traps for adventurous crickets. They only hoped that her slumber was genuine.

He was almost there. The women and children crickets observed with a mixture of fear and admiration for Marty. He made many allies and friends that day as a result of his bravery for the good of the cricket community. The crowd gasped audibly as Marty raised his sword and poked Phoenix in the nose, awakening her. They all thanked the gods that they had someone as gallant and intrepid as Marty to come to their rescue.

Phoenix ran, startled, a split second after being viciously jabbed in the nose. Her tough skin protected her from damage, but it was not a pleasant way to wake up. Marty held on for dear life as she skittered around frantically. Eventually the atrocity of a lizard calmed down and Marty was able to initiate part two of his plan: going for the vital organs in her stomach.

The crickets watching were amazed as they looked at the sheer size of the enemy Marty was facing. She was immense. Her huge claws curled around her toes menacingly; one look of her beady eyes was enough to send shivers down the spine of almost any creature; and worst of all, her incredible speed gave her an advantage over anything smaller than she. The sheer power of Phoenix had many children unconsciously reaching for their mothers' hands.

Yet on battled Marty. He was far too brave to be worried about inconsequential trivialities such as the futility of his quest. Now he was valiantly trying to get in a good blow to secure his victory. Suddenly he realized that Phoenix was looking at him hungrily. He glanced at his watch for a split second. Yes, it was past her feeding time. Marty tried to evaluate the situation and his rationale told him one thing and one thing only: A digested hero is not a good hero. Marty quickly did the socially responsible thing to do and fled. He could always return after Phoenix had eaten.

And return he shall.



My Grandparents' Land--Killaloe, County Claire, Ireland
John D. Groppe

Too little space between river and hills
to bury all born here,
too little hope here
despite tales of royal glory and the rich river,
so they left to be buried
far from stone slab huts of hermit monks
and defiant towers of warrior architects,
far from sheepfolds and salmon runs,
and carried with them names from their past
to endow their children
and their children's children
with a kindly courage.

(end)

Bowling Night
Rachel Barlage

He picks up the babysitter
on the way home from
the office.

Has time to kill
before he and his wife
meet the other couples
for drinks.

Turns on the T.V.,
pushes the small, firm
buttons
on the remote control.
Images appear and disappear.
Melt into each other.
This form of entertainment
little more than an
exercise of power.

They always had drinks
before they bowled.
It seemed that everyone
had more fun
after a few beers.

They were louder.
They laughed more.
All smiles,
even when losing.

It didn't really matter
anymore
who won or lost.

Just another routine.
The same as driving to work
each morning.

They would almost rather
stay home.
But that would be
an admission of something.

They didn't want to admit
anything.

After they bowled,
they would drink some more.
Go home
to their small, white house
in the suburbs,
pay the babysitter,
discuss weekend plans,
make love.

Fall asleep
with their backs to each other,
listening to the neighbor's dog
bark savagely
at the leaves blowing in the
cold, wet air.

Lost Years

Danielle Adams

The wide-eyed cloud gazer
sees beyond the range of sight.
Captured by her own reflection,
gazing at her closest friend.
Swinging was flying,
The ant a miracle,
Puddles her happy hour.
The invented babble,
her meaningful expression.

A child,
innocence at its purest.

Kid Brothers

To my brother, Bradley Bultman
JaLeen Deardurff

Kid brothers can be such a pain in the rear.
Mine was no different, he was a real drear!
Whenever I wanted to be by myself
he was there bothering me, like a pesky wee elf.

I once had a dollhouse with furniture and such.
Brother sat down, and I heard a loud CRUNCH!
Pieces of plastic scattered about.
I cried out in anger, then booted him out.

"Puff the Magic Dragon" was my favorite song.
Brother broke the record, and my heart with it along.
I tried keeping my things out of his way,
but somehow he managed to find them anyway.

I had baby dolls that could potty and cry.
Brother had a train set, to which he'd tie.
I had a bicycle with streamers so new.
He had pliers, a hammer, and then a pile of screws.

I had a driver's license, my freedom had come.
Then brother informed me, he wanted to go along.
I tried to protest, but Mother thought it was good.
"Be together," she said. "Enjoy your childhood!"

I thought I was cool as I drove through town,
but Brother was there, making me frown.
He made faces at people, to which I berated.
I didn't want anyone to know we were related.

When high school was over, I went out on my own
without my kid brother, and suddenly I felt alone.
I called him and asked how he was doing.
He said okay, but life was pretty boring.

When I got married, my brother was there,
complete with mischievous grin, and long wavy hair.
To my surprise, he kissed me on the cheek,
wished me well, and walked away meek.

My brother was married later that year,
and I pitied his wife, because she was such a dear.
He still liked to pull off a practical joke.
Inside this man, was the boy I wished to choke.

As the years went by we finally became friends.
My brother and I often laugh at our past sins.
It's a wonder we survived, my brother and I,
what with his antics, and my suspicious eye.

We grew into adults, I moved north, he moved south.
I miss my brother, even his big mouth.
Now I look back at life with him as fun,
and the best part is, he now has two sons!

Piano Lessons

Rachel Barlage

The door was locked, but the child reached
into her shirt, two sizes too small,
and pulled out a cold, metal key
on a frayed piece of yarn
tied loosely around her neck.

The sound of metal against metal,
a quick turn and a sharp click
opened the front door.
She retreated inside and pulled
the door closed behind her.

In the screaming silence of the house
she slapped her hands over her ears
and began to hum loudly to the room,
dropping a heavy bag filled with
science books and an uneaten lunch.

Walking past the glare of a large
mirror in the hallway, her eyes on the hardwood floor
and her muddy shoes, her fingers reached down
from her covered ears to the peach peel softness
of the slightly raised brown spots
on her forehead, her cheeks, her chin.

Her trembling fingers slid down her neck,
feeling the birthmarks as if for the first time.
Then they moved back up: neck, chin, cheeks, forehead,
until she jerked her hands away in horror.

At the foot of the stairs, she looked up
to a green plant, leaves reaching
through the railing high above.
She took a step, fingers clutching the guardrail,
and then another, and one more.
Her breathing heavy, heart beating faster, faster
as she ran up the stairs.

At the top, feeling the plush carpet beneath her shoes,
turning her head past the plant stand and
into the room at the end of the hall,
she allowed a thin-lipped smile
to touch her womb-scarred face.

Not taking her eyes off of the piano that
sat in the middle of the room,
she walked down the hallway and
into her room, closed the door, and
lodged a chair under the tarnished knob.

She reached her arms in front of her,
walked like Frankenstein to the piano
eyes closed. Her fingers touched
the worn wood of her upright.
Felt their way to the keyboard,
to the smooth, cool keys,
the groups of thin, raised ones,
the cracks between the lower, wide ones.
Black and white. Silky. Hers.

She opened her eyes and sat on the bench,
melodies chasing each other through
her slowly lightening head.
Bach, Mendelssohn, Beethoven....
She sat still for a moment, warm
sunshine dancing through a small window
high on the wall, warming her hands
as they rested on the familiar keys.

Soulmates

Robert C. Pfaff

I look at you
and realize I have looked at you before.

I listen to you
and realize I have listened to you before.

I speak to you
and realize I have spoken to you before.

I touch you
and realize I have touched you before.

I taste you
and realize I have tasted you before.

I know you
and realize I have known you before.

I love you
and realize I have loved you before.

I gaze into your eyes
and I see your soul
as it is now,
as it has always been,
as it will always be.

This cannot be our first lifetime together
nor can it be our last.

We are soulmates
and this is our destiny and our blessing.

Dry Water

Martin Bakowski

Bourbon is a wicked brew;
7-UP no doubt adds to its pleasure.
I take a long, thoughtless drag
From my cigarette - nicotine
Quickens the pulse, you know.

Sis, you try and figure me out
(With little success)-
Typical of a psychology major.
I guess I'll let you worry about me.
I really can't think or walk or see straight.

So what if I lost the receipt for it.
If it's broken, it's probably for the better.
I don't really think that way;
Keep you from theorizing correctly.
It makes my game more fun, you know.

I like it the way we do things.
It's easier to sleep and it
Keeps me on my toes.
And so my charity continually grows;
I think you're the only one to see me cry.

Sis, you have the upper hand on me there;
I probably broke down - it won't happen again.
As I sit here and think, my veins
Flowing and pulsating evilly, my heart is still
Swollen with something I can never have.

Circles

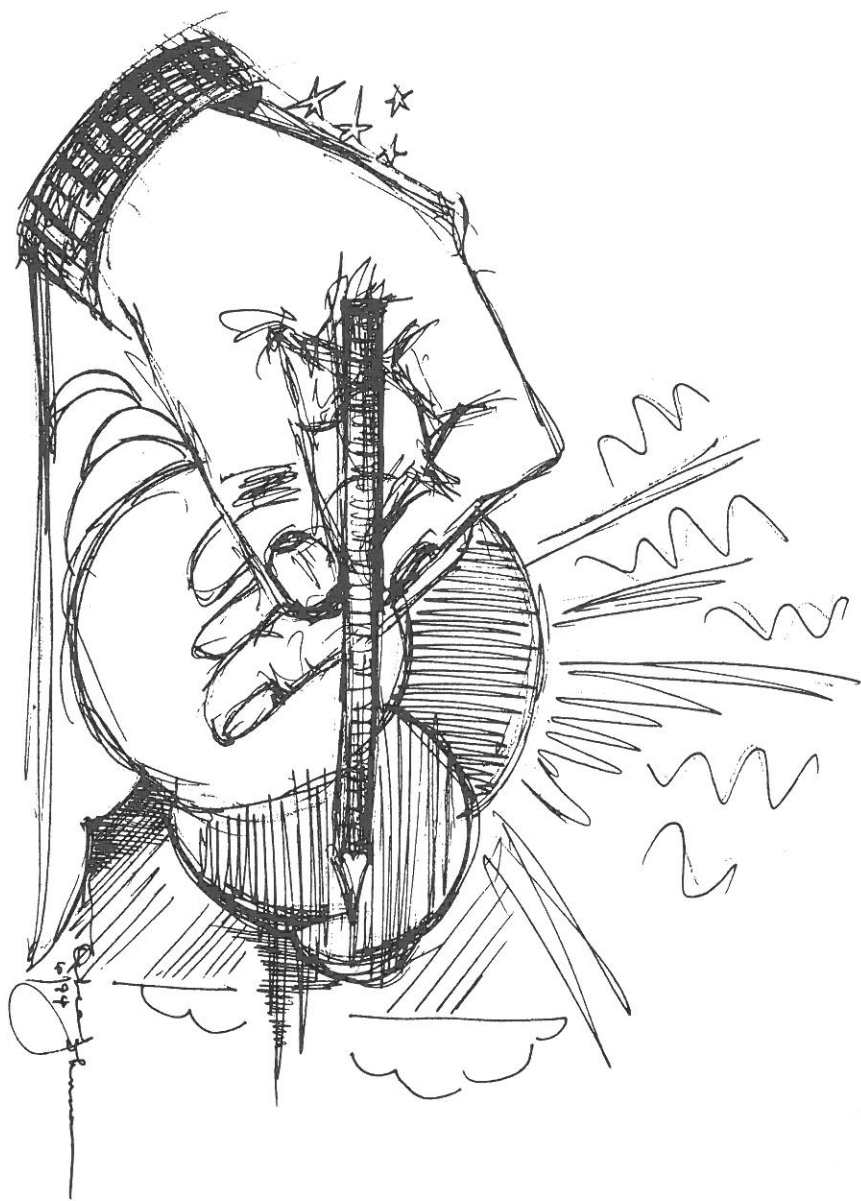
Jason Grzegorek

The circular clock clings to the wall;
measuring pasts, presents, and futures.
It continues to move in a spiral pattern,
as do you.

The children sit in a circuit;
doodling in peripheries.
Their thoughts swirl in a vortex,
as do you.

The water in the fountain drains like a coil;
curving, circumscribing into its conduit.
The liquid aimlessly goes into nothing,
as do you.

You talk and lecture in a trance;
somnambulently, fearfully.
Can't you see how you entrap us,
like the circle.



"No Knock" Warrant
Danielle Adams

The door ripped open.
Combat fatigues,
Commotion!
Confusion!
Catastrophe hits!
A heart beat in the corner
J U M P S,
Their line of protection crossed.

The victimized innocent,
dead.
"Sorry, wrong apartment."

(Society gone mad.)

The Future Life
Becky Johnson

I see the darkness of waving hands;
They guide me through the open holes of
unsanctified lands.
As we tour the palace of the dead;
I can't help but think, is this all in my head.
I find myself on a cliff, looking up and down;
Realizing I'm being watched from all around.
Now it's time to mimic my destiny,
But this choice has already been made for me.
As I say some prayers and feel some stares;
I'm being lifted into the light, from God,
and all his might.

The Loss of Self

Virginia Evens

The soft and wet cotton tips of the waves crash
continuously against the rusted shell of
my being.

I can no more control the rushing of the waves then I can control the slow
dilapidation of my shell.

The harsh salts burn me.

The hungry creatures within it cling to me, sucking holes.

The brown ragged and rusted piece of my shell fall into
the hungry sea and it eats ravenously,
Slamming against me as it feasts.

And I wait within this slowly rusting, rotting shell,
For utter consumption.

The Beach

Kevin M. Ray

As I listen to the ocean's roar,
And watch the seagulls as they soar,
a feeling of peace comes over me,
as if I were a wave upon the sea.

My life at times can go astray,
as life's stresses eat my heart away.
But like these gulls above the sea,
the ocean calls out to me.

And as I walk along its sands,
and feel its waves wash into my hands,
I feel myself being washed away,
from the problems of the previous day.

Prince Charming
Amy Ceader

He is a little snip of a man,
barely five feet tall.
A little pot belly looming over his belt.
The hair on his head has fallen out a long time ago.
But hair now grows out of his ears.

He has a nails-across-the chalkboard voice.
His eyes peer out from behind coke-bottle glasses.

He has ice cold feet
which he leans against her at night.

Who would ever have thought that after all
these years he'd still be Prince Charming?

Memory
S. H.

The memory of my last visit with you wraps
around me like a well-loved flannel shirt.
I cherish your warmth and the knowledge of you near me.
The softness against my skin rejuvenates me.
The peace I feel lulls me away from my fear and back
into your presence.
I can now go out and face the world again,
with you surrounding me.

Volunteering at Children's Hospital

Rachel Barlage

Glue tight under my nails
Thick and wet on my
Fingertips
As they press into greasy newspaper.
He touches my hand,
Curiously.
I dip his tiny fingers into white glue
Guide them over the
Cool plastic of the mold.

Encased in my palm,
His now-bruised hand
Feels soft.
He adds ragged strips of
Newspapers
To the face of the mask
With his free hand.
As he moves his arm,
Clear I.V. tubes roll up and down
In shallow waves.

His eyes are startling blue.
Bright buttons on the familiar contour
Of his face.
I study his fragile figure
Through the thick odor of
Cleaning fluids and illness.
His swollen hand shakes
Violently
As I lift his fingers off the mask,
Bring them slowly to my lips,
and kiss them.

The taste of glue
Spreading Elmer's on my palm
Reminds me of third grade
So I could pull it off in thin strips
When it dried clear and shiny.
He pulls my steady hand back to the table
Presses it firmly into the newspaper,
Fingers locked in a
Sticky embrace.

A million machines beep
Through the patient silence,
Drain the room of any cheerfulness
Despite the bright trains and paper dolls
Painted on the pale yellow walls.
We are ready to paint the mask,
But he doesn't want
Blue, red, yellow.
We will make purple.

The Unborn Lamentation
Virginia Evans

I'm nothing I don't exist.
I'm not here writing this.
I can't feel, I can't cry.
I'm just nothing, tell me why.
I want to be like you.
I want to be alive.
But I can't,
Cause I'm dead inside.

Spoonerisms

Heather Moser

Hello, I am a tablespoon. I am just like every other spoon in the Saint Joseph's cafeteria, just a clone of my 500 brothers and sisters. This story will probably be bland because spoons such as me never really get the opportunity to develop a personality like knives do. They get all the breaks. Butcher knives, paring knives, serrated bread knives... now they know their place in life. But a spoon is all-purpose. But I don't want to bother you with my inconsequential problems. I will just tell you about my day and then let you go talk to someone much more interesting, like a glamorous salad fork.

My name is Delco. Actually it is Delco Stainless Steel Japan, but you can call me Delco for short. We spoons all have the same name. It understandably leads to identity crises. But enough about that.

My morning starts early. I get thrown into a metallic cylinder with about fifty other spoons, and we are thrust onto the counter without a care for our well-being. It is dark in the cylinder, and often clammy because not every spoon gets dried off. A lot of the time I am squashed to the bottom of the heap because the others are so pushy, so eager to be chosen by the zombie-like throngs of college students with eight o'clock classes.

Let's assume that I am actually selected by a near-comatose freshman. I am unceremoniously thrown onto a warm red tray that is frequently still damp. The student stumbles on, occasionally running into things as though he's a bumper car. He manages to grasp a cereal bowl and seems to grin, congratulating himself for the accomplishment. Presuming he is now awake enough to work the cereal containers (running into all of those walls is bound to wake him up!), I wait patiently while he fills his bowl with Cocoa Krispies. I emit nary a complaint whilst drowning in milk that has been poured virtually everywhere but in the cereal bowl. He finally picks me up and plunges me into the still basically dry cereal. I am lifted into his mouth and—

OH YUCK! DOESN'T THIS GUY EVER BRUSH HIS TEETH????

I can still see the flecks of broccoli soup from yesterday's lunch! And apparently he has been eating without me because I can smell pepperoni pizza that I had no part in. And - no, it couldn't be - it is! Popcorn hulls from last Wednesday! It's too much, I can't go on....

I can tell it's going to be a long day.

The day gets better from there. (It has to, doesn't it?) I eventually end up thrown into a dishwasher that burns my skin, but is hopefully hot enough to rid me of that awful gingivitis stench. Then it starts all over.

There you have it. My view of the world. It's full of loud, hungry adolescents; full of hot food and bowls of cereal to drown in; full of repetitiveness and neverending ennui. But I guess I don't really deserve better. After all, I am just Delco Stainless Steel Japan, and I am just like every other spoon you'll ever meet, except I have almost no hope for the future. Oh, I suppose I may get slipped into someone's backpack and live a fulfilling life in a nice girl's dorm room, but that kind of thing doesn't happen to an ordinary spoon like me.

Night

Robert C. Pfaff

Night.

A time of dreams
of what may be
if all goes right.

A time of closeness
with the spirits
that form the soul.

A time of reflection
of the nights
gone by.

A time of anticipation
of the woman
who hides in the moonlight.

A time of love
when appearances
are cast aside.

A time of confusion
when reality
diverges from fantasy.

A time of pain
when you realize
reality wins.

Our Enchanted Playground

Amy Moss

On a cold, snowy evening
My friend and I departed on a journey
Far away to our enchanted playground.

Smooth, crisp snow covered the ground,
White as far as the eye could see.
A winter wonderland was our enchanted playground.

We tracked merrily through the snow,
Breaking the beautiful monotony of
our enchanted playground.

We tried hard to reach the sky,
Falling short each time,
On the magical swings of our enchanted playground.

We raced down and around,
Thrown hard to the ground
By the evil curly slide of our enchanted playground.

Swinging our arms back and forth,
We made beautiful snow angels
On the ground of our enchanted playground.

We made snowballs and snow falls.
We ran and laughed through the cold snow
Of our enchanted playground.

Weary, we retired to the "old people's" swing.
Where we sat,
Mystified by the silent magic of our enchanted playground.

Cold, we walked away,
Looking back to forever embrace in our minds
Our beautiful enchanted playground.

Rings

Lisa L. Curley

A stately, proud, tree holds hands with the evening sun.
Roots anchored deep in the clay and lime of Southern Indiana,
A branch, one among many, majestically brushes the skies.
Half of only two left growing leaves and bearing the fruit of life.
A matching Golden Apple stands with dignity at His side.
The last of Her branches to bloom.

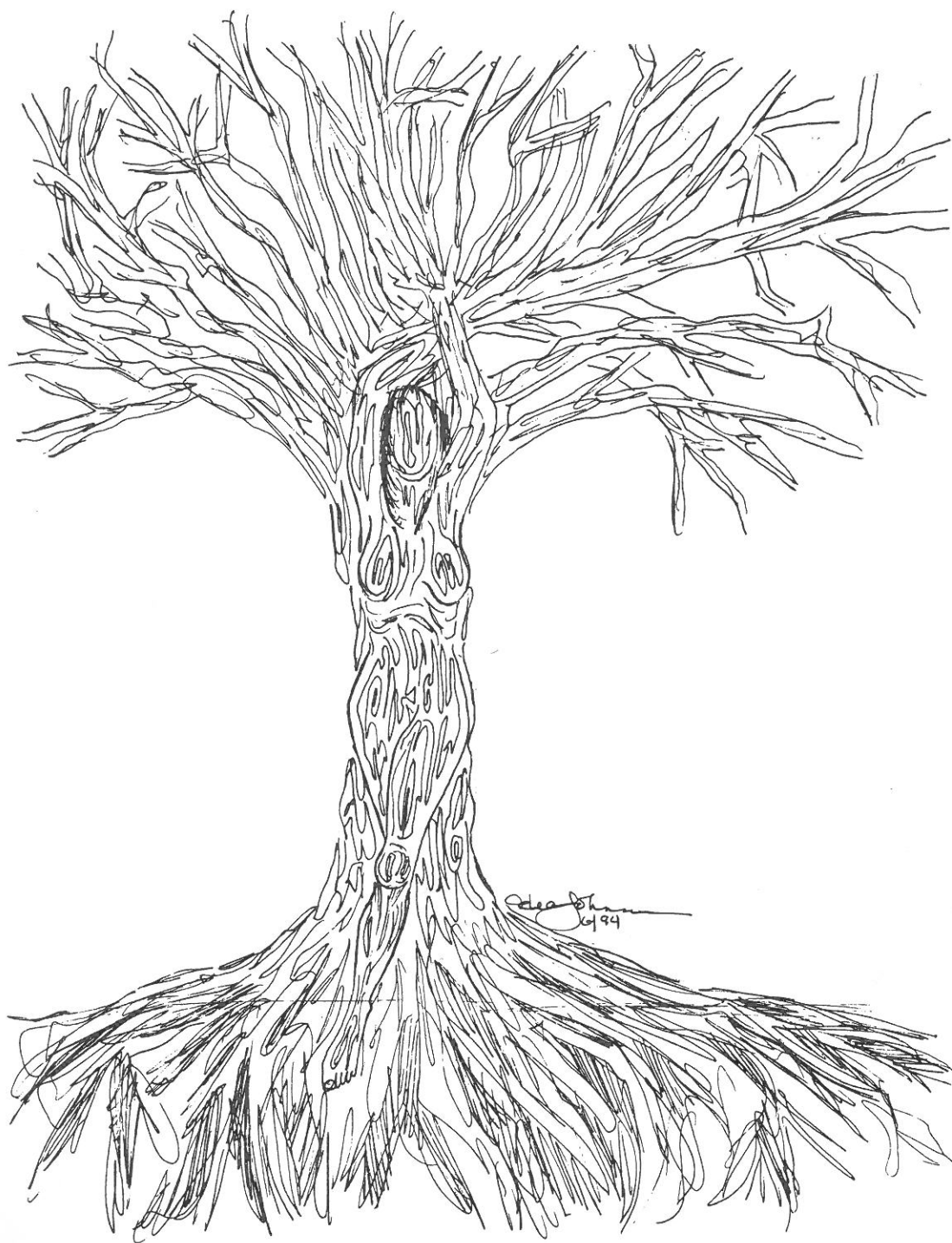
Together, Irish green leaves greet the spring's new life,
and cool the heat of the summer solstice.
Then, as bravely as before, they blaze fall's gray skies
with streaks of a fiery spectrum.
When stripped of beauty and color in winter,
patiently, they live for the comfort of spring's sun to bring life
to their branches once more.

Saplings that they so lovingly weaned,
Prospered under strong, beautiful branches,
offering them protection and strength,
enough for bantling saplings to
Sprout,

Flourish,

and Bloom.

The years have added many rings,
While fresh bark grew strong, and thick,
The leaves grow, and they fall,
Though the seasons age their branches,
Love, has strengthened their Rings,
As they broaden to share life
And loving souls, mature and wise
With all who grave the shade of their leaves.



Before I Slit My Wrists

Virginia Evans

A part of my soul has been ripped from me and tossed aside like loose soil.
I want so much to run my fingers through your hair and whisper softly,
I love you, I love you, but I cannot.
My love remains, but you are gone.
My heart pains, and you are gone.
The tears flow, my heart slows, my love exists,
But I, no more.

Cathedral

Danielle Adams

Out there,
The trees waited,
dressed in new white lace,
looking pure for the visitor.
Morning light,
Creating a bridge from heaven,
Shyly,
peeked through the haven.
Nests awoke,
while buttress branches enveloped their beauty.
The forest,
A cathedral for the Pagan.

The Train

by J.W. Sacco

On the north side of Chicago there is a small real estate company that has been there for years. They have just recently hired a young guy out of college named Matt. On Matt's second day there he is scheduled to show a house, he calls upon the eight year veteran Bill to see what he should do; Bill calls him into his office.

"Sit down Matt," Bill rumbles, his gray hair moving slightly as he speaks, "let's talk."

Matt looks around the room, he is nervous, he is new.

"Well ya' gonna' sit down or what?" Bill rumbles even louder. He is starting to lose patience with the rookie.

Matt takes a seat across from Bill, still very nervous, but after the scolding very attentive.

"So kiddo, what house are you showing today?"

"Th...the brownstone on Lincoln," Matt answers nervously.

Bill turns silent, his face as white as a ghost.

"Are you sure?" Bill asks.

Matt reaches into his pocket and pulls out his appointment reminder.

"Here it is sir."

He was right there it was in big black letters.

"1213 North Lincoln Avenue"

"Katerba Family"

"3 p.m."

"I better tell you the story son," Bill said reluctantly.

"What story," Matt replied. He leaned closer to Bill; he seemed very intrigued.

"Well it was ten years ago...."

And so the story began.

"Honey where is my silverware box?," yelled the young woman from the Kitchen.

"I don't know dear," was the answer she got from one of the upstairs bedrooms.

The young man in the bedroom continued to rummage through his box of clothes. This family had just bought the brownstone on Lincoln Ave. and were very involved in unpacking all their boxes.

Suddenly, the house began to shake and a loud roar filled the old brownstone. Doug poked his head out from inside his walk, in closet to look out the back window. A Chicago CTA elevated train flew by on the tracks not more than six feet from the window. Doug Smith rolled his eyes; it was something he was going to have to learn to live with.

"I don't know about this Doug," yelled Bonnie, Doug's wife, from the downstairs kitchen.

Doug just rolled his eyes again, obviously sick of hearing his wife question the buying of this house.

"Honey, don't worry about it...this house is great."

Doug turned back into the closet, suddenly a box fell off the shelf and its contents of spoons and forks fell all over Doug.

"And I found your damned silverware."

The Smith's were tired from the chore of unpacking and were ready to go to bed for the first time in their new house. They spread out a sleeping bag on the floor and were asleep as soon as they hit their makeshift bed. Around three in the morning Doug woke up to a sound in one of the other bedrooms... a scratching sound. He got up and walked down the dimly lighted hallway to where the noise was coming from.

All he could make out in the dark room was the outline of the still full boxes. He walked further into the room when something he saw out of the corner of his eye made him jump back in fright.

A young boy...or at least it appeared to be a boy, was sitting in the corner of the room.

"What the hell are you doing in my house?" Doug growled at the young lad.

There was no answer.

Doug went to grab the little boy but stopped just short of doing so. He was frozen with astonishment... the boy was dressed in what appeared to be 1920's clothes and even though the boy was right there in front of him, Doug could see the wall behind the boy...he was transparent.

"Who... I mean what are you?" Doug whispered.

The boy looked at Doug and began to shake.

"Please sir, take my place," the boy said in a voice that seemed as transparent as his body.

Doug continued to stare at the boy... not understanding what he was saying.

"Take your place??"

The young boy began to jitter nervously.

"Take my place."

The clock in the living room struck 3:15 and the boy jumped up and onto the nearby window.

"Take my place."

Suddenly there was a rumble on the tracks outside. The young ghost jumped onto the tracks and began to run across them. Doug looked out the window but saw no train... Suddenly a train appeared.. an elevated train from the 1920's. The train also seemed to be transparent, but to the young ghost it was real. As he got to the third track the train hit the young ghost. The impact sent the specter flying limp through the air and finally landing on the tracks some twenty feet away. The train disappeared and Doug ran out onto the tracks to the young boy.

The ghost lay there, motionless. Doug tried to pick him up but his hands went right through him.

"Take my place," the ghost said softly, "take my place."

Then he disappeared.

That morning Doug did not dare mention any of this to Bonnie. He waited for her to go to work and then began to investigate some more. He began to walk through the house and found what appeared to be an entrance to the attic. He lowered the ladder and climbed up into the attic.

He poked his head in and saw the transparent boy sitting all alone in the attic.

"Hello," Doug whispered.

The boy jumped up and was obviously startled.

"Help me," the ghost said softly.

"How can I?"

"You must end it, end the cycle. You must take my place."

"I don't understand...tell me," Doug said to the ghost.

"End the cycle, please take my place," was the only reply that the ghost would give. The young specter rose up and walked through the wall; he was gone.

"Take his place," Doug said himself. That night Doug slept in the bedroom where he first saw the ghost. He sat there with his eyes open and was thinking about what the ghost said to him.

"What does he mean... take his place...end the cycle. I don't know....wait... I have to step in front of the train for him. I can save his tormented soul... all I have to do is step in front of the ghost train. It won't hurt me... it'll go right through me and he'll be saved," Doug had the solution and waited for the ghost.

The clock struck three and there was the boy sitting in the corner as he was before.

"I think I understand," Doug told the young ghost.

"You mean you'll take my place?" the ghost asked.

"Yes I want to save you... I can save you."

"Thank you."

Suddenly the house began to rumble; the train was coming. Both Doug and the ghost walked out onto the tracks hand in hand. They walked to the third track and waited. The train continued forward; Doug closed his eyes and tightened his grip around the ghost hand.

The train was no more than ten feet away when Doug opened his eyes and saw that it was no longer a ghost train but a real elevated train.

"Oh God," was all that Doug could get out of his mouth before the train slammed into him.

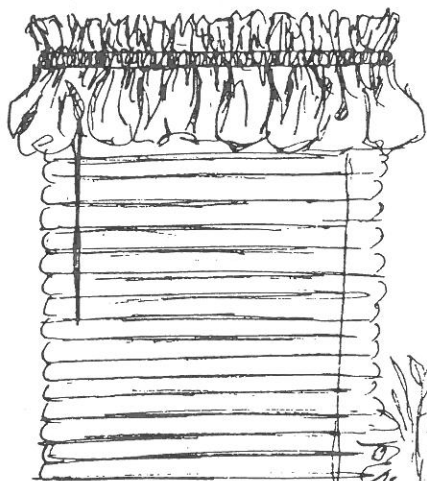
The impact from the speeding train stole the life from Doug. His lifeless body flew through the air and landed about fifty feet from the impact.

The young ghost hovered over to Doug's body, he wiped the blood from Doug's nose.

"Thank you," he said as he began to ascend to peace, "thank you."

Matt sold that house to the family and their first night there the new owner heard a noise from one of the bedrooms. He walked down the poorly lit corridor to the bedroom. He looked around and saw a man sitting in the corner of the room.

"My name is Doug, I need you to take my place," the ghost said to the man. Suddenly there was a rumbling outside on the tracks....



The Walk Home
Rachel Barlage

She held it tightly in her hand
grasped desperately between her thumb and
her raw, peeling fingers.

This week's promise of salvation,
a white and blue
Business Reply Card.
No postage necessary.

Tonight it was the Peace Corps,
last weekend a community college.
On other long walks home it had been
a pottery class,
a foreign exchange program,
a religious retreat.

The small wooden desk in her bedroom
lost beneath a pile of
square cards.

White
speckled with
yellow,
 lavender,
 green

unsolicited possibilities.

Bright swirls of color glistened beneath
harsh white streetlights
as they slid around on the surface
of the oily puddles of water
spotting the sidewalks.

Staring down
at the rough black pavement
still shimmering from the rain,
her sleeves damp from
dirty dishwater,
matted hair slick with grease and sweat,
pressed to her head beneath a
black hair net,
she calculated her hours,
the rent she owed her parents,
the cost of day care.

The card slipped from
her fingertips,
fluttered to the ground.

Through
telephone wires
and tree branches,
she saw faraway stars
and wished on an airplane.

Sadness Part I:
Stolen Childhood
Anonymous

A single tear ran down her face
As he left the room.
No where to hide, no safe place.
No one to tell her secret to.

So young and tender, a child's soul;
Fifteen to be exact.
A woman's body blossomed full,
Forced to commit an adult act.

She learns to be brave, hold her head in the air.
She trains the pain to stop.
After all, who would listen? Who would care?
Who would say, "It's not your fault"?



She is...

Robert C. Pfaff

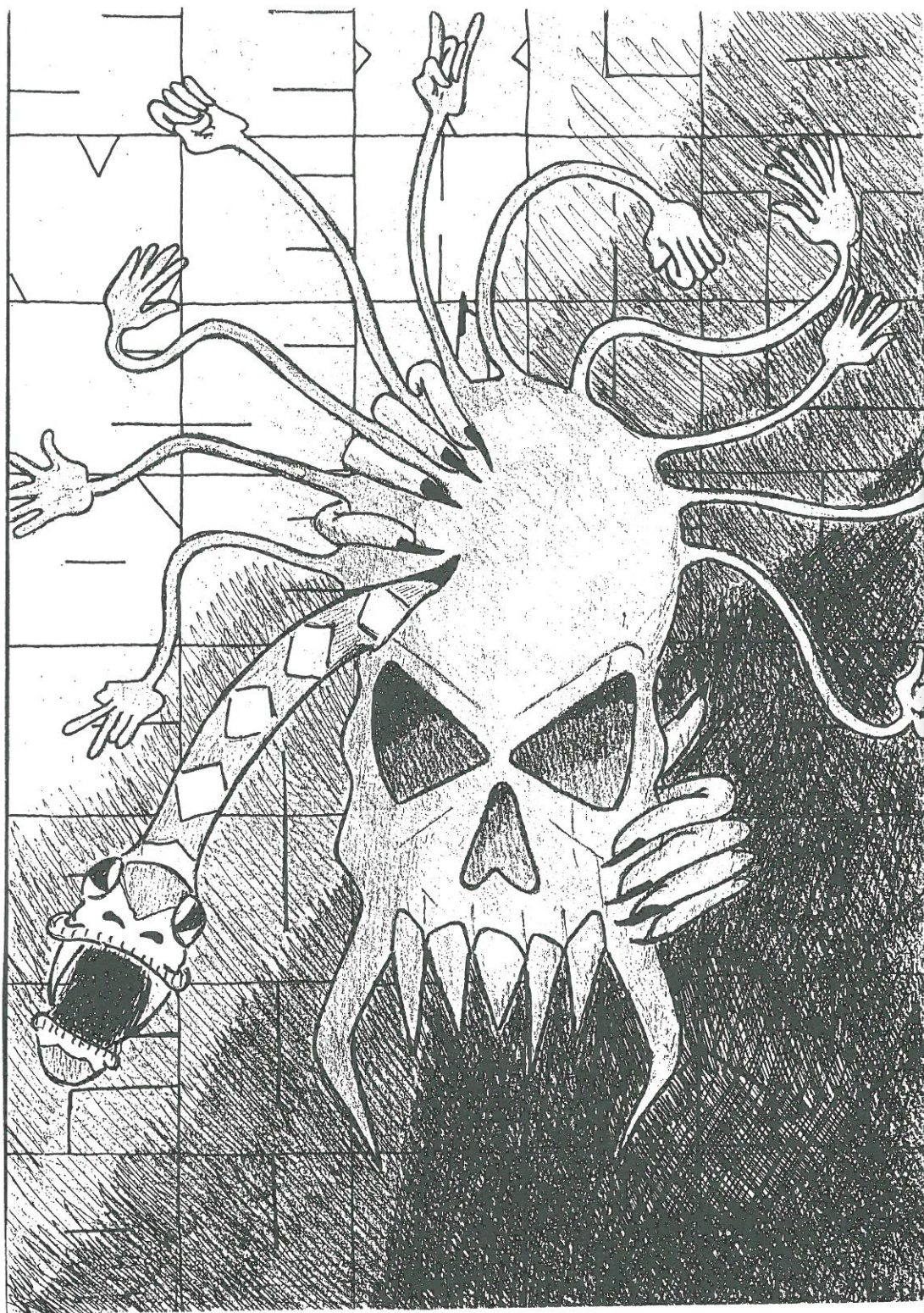
She is a stone
that warms as the sun allows
and cools with the snow
and warms again, even warmer,
and cracks when the ice comes
and somehow remains
just as nature intended.

She is a pond
that reflects the beauty all around
only to take the darkness to hide
what is there
and to reveal the beauty again at the
glow of a torch or of the moon
and still remains
just as nature intended.

She is a bird
sunning on a clear day,
wanting to ride the beams
yet unsure of what lies
over the ridge,
but driven to search for whatever
is there and unable to accept the
beauty passed by until the currents
forbid her return
and as cruel as it seems.
this too remains
just as nature intended.

She is a tree
rejoicing in the coming of spring,
sure to be battered by storms
and sure to spring up stronger,
shaking in the wind in anticipation
of what the new season will bring,
and she grows
and ages
and flourishes
and remains
just as nature intended.

She is a woman
afraid of her life yet
afraid not to live it to its fullest
and eager to learn
and grow
and experience the things held as dreams
such as beauty
and trust
and friendship
and love
and this too remains
just as nature intended.



Here's A Head

Ryan Wright

Well I don't have many friends, you see.
They say I'm strange & sick & queer.
But that really doesn't bother me.
I don't hold close friends too dear.
When I was a little boy.
I sat in my room alone all day.
Cause I don't really like the sun too much.
And I've never been that fond of play.

And while the other kids crashed their Matchbox cars.
And kicked their stupid cans.
I just laughed & held them in contempt.
Cause I had bigger plans.

Here's a head, I think it's dead...
But I'm not really sure.
Before you're sick, tell me quick...
Is it something you'd explore?
If it breaks, or escapes...
Don't worry I've got more.
So here's a head, I think it's dead...
Take it.
It's yours.

Well I sneak around, but I'm never caught.
I watch what all the neighbors do.
And I'd have to say that I've always thought...
I'd get on famously with you.
Why don't you come on over & stay awhile?
Pay no attention to the smell.
I really think you'll love my collection.
I take care of it really well.

Cause while the rest of the fat slobs in this neighborhood...
Waste their time mowing lawns.
I just laugh & hold them in contempt.
Cause they're all just retarded pawns.

Here's a head, I think it's dead...
But I'm not really sure.
Before you're sick, tell me quick...
Is it something you'd explore?
If it breaks, or escapes...
Don't worry I've got more.
So here's a head, I think it's dead...
Take it.
It's yours.

The Julia Dream
Pat Lennon

I drench myself in this dream
A dream thousands before had encountered
Her immaculate mane, her whispered words, her silent walk.

I am forever anchored on her island of diamond eyes
Her puffed lips like cotton candy surround her sensual smile
The unveiling of an eyelash wink.

Her desert-toned legs stand vigor like the mighty oak
Hand-crafted bodily curves of alien mastery
Sun gleaming and tan-soaked.

At last a tear crawls from my eye
She slowly takes another arm
Turns, and waves good-bye.

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